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ABSTRACT

Staff development is rapidly becoming more visible and more expensive. School boards and the voting public are becoming aware of the increasing costs and are demanding to know how effectively the money is being spent. It will become increasingly difficult, even job-threatening, for superintendents who guide ineffective staff development programs. Superintendents, boards, and other responsible school officials are growing dissatisfied with staff development programs generated by questionnaires that ask teachers and administrators what they need to do to improve. Generally, this process lacks focus and is unrelated to curriculum or curriculum improvement. "Collegially" oriented initiatives either fail to address the more basic question of school culture or vastly underestimate what is involved in implementing change. Contrived collegiality (through peer coaching, mentor teaching, and joint planning) can force unwanted contacts between teachers and intensify teacher isolation. This paper argues that the most effective needs assessment for staff development is a comprehensive curriculum study that considers whether dropout rates, attendance, suspensions, academic achievement, planning, parent involvement, and curriculum effectiveness need further investigation and/or improvement. Since curriculum is the most important school mission, money spent to improve curriculum by improving staff skills is an effective use of resources. (9 references) (MLH)

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CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT SHOULD DRIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Staff development is rapidly becoming more visible and more expensive. School Boards and the voting public are becoming aware of the increasing costs, and with awareness comes the demand to know how effectively the money is being used. It will become increasingly difficult, even job threatening, for Superintendents who guide ineffective staff development programs. The authors take the position that the most effective needs assessment for staff development is a comprehensive curriculum study. Curriculum, in the broad sense, is the most important mission of the schools. Money spent to improve curriculum by improving staff skills is an effective use of resources. The authors present guideline questions for a comprehensive curriculum study as well as sources of information for designing staff development activities.

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As a profession or activity grows it wrestles with definitions. It appears that "staff development and "inservice" are used interchangeably. According to Fullan (1990), staff development is conceived broadly to include any activity or process intended to improve skills, attitudes, understandings, or performances in present or future roles. As educators continue to conduct research, develop programs, and discuss issues, it is possible that the terms will assume distinct meanings, or one will become more prominent. For the purposes of this paper, the term "staff development" will be used when discussing programs for improving the professional skills of educators.

In recent years, staff development programs and activities have assumed an increasingly high profile existence. Staff development programs are becoming expensive in that districts and states are earmarking increasingly larger amounts to fund more diverse activities for more participants. When this happens, when the cost of a program increases dramatically, there is usually an increased demand for accountability and results. From a practical standpoint, Superintendents and Boards want positive results from staff development expenses. In order to justify expenses and budget new amounts, the sooner measurable results are obtained the better and, it is common knowledge that vast resources have been expended on staff development programs that have generated little or no classroom change (Joyce and Showers, 1982).

Paris (1989) believes that staff development has political-type problems. It is big business, as much related to power bureaucratic positioning and territoriality as it is to providing assistance to teachers and helping students. This problem of harnessing staff development is compounded by its increasingly sprawling prominence. It is correctly seen as the central strategy for improvement, but it is also frequently separated from the institutional and personal contexts in which it operates (Fullan, 1990).

In a number of states, staff development programs are mandated, and this is increasing the amount of dollars being spent on staff development activities. Because Board of Education members are responsible to the voters, Board members are legitimately concerned about how effectively public money is being spent. It is not unusual for Board members to ask the Superintendent "how effective is the staff development program we're spending so much money on"? Often, the

Superintendent doesn't know. How is a staff development program evaluated? A disgruntled teacher expressing negative comments about his/her staff development activities to a Board member is evaluating staff development. Negative comments from any source, regardless of their non-legitimate nature, are evaluative statements.

Superintendents are, by and large, very practical people. When asked about the effectiveness of the staff development program, the practical Superintendent can "ride out" the staff development effectiveness question by recounting for the Board the number of people who were involved in various activities. This is hardly an evaluation, but it will probably suffice. Staff development is only one issue of many that a Superintendent deals with, and providing a program description instead of an evaluation will probably help the Superintendent survive. For now. But remember, the research is indicating that staff development is gaining more and more attention and is steadily growing in prominence (Fullan, 1990). One result of this higher profile will be that Superintendents will find it more difficult, if not impossible, to obfuscate with Boards regarding the effectiveness of the staff development program.

In contrast to the traditional and usually ineffective staff development initiatives is the situation in Pittsburgh, Pa., where Superintendent Wallace authorized a districtwide needs assessment (Cooley and Bickel, 1986) prior to establishing the staff development program. The purpose of the needs assessment was to determine the degree to which the schools were meeting the educational needs of the clients, the children. The needs assessment also suggested priorities for improving the educational program. The focus of the assessment was identifying problems that the district could reasonably be expected to solve.

The current situation appears to be that Superintendents, Boards, and other responsible school officials are growing dissatisfied with staff development programs that are generated by questionnaires and opinionnaires that ask teachers and administrators what they believe they should do to improve. Generally, this process lacks a <u>focus</u> and usually is <u>not</u> related to curriculum or curriculum improvement. We are speaking here of curriculum in the broad sense and includes planned and written courses, instructional techniques, materials, and assessments.

Fullan (1990) believes that staff development should influence both classroom improvement and school improvement through identifying and fostering systematic links between the two. He further contends that staff development should be refocused so that it is a driving force for school reform. He sees that concern for student engagement and student learning as necessary components for successful staff development. Such programs are characterized as less fragmented and more purposeful, and are usually more linked to classroom and school development as determined by professional staff. A comprehensive vision of staff development was proposed by Schaefer, who envisioned schools involving

students in driving inquiry, and also involving teachers in continuous study of teaching and learning. Examples of some ineffective staff development programs were identified by Snyder and Anderson and by Joyce and Weil. Snyder and Anderson (1986) cautioned against inservice programs directed only to needs in the cognitive domain, i.e., providing new knowledge. Joyce and Weil (1986) cautioned against belief that one single teaching strategy is always effective.

The position taken here is that staff development should be related to curriculum, because curriculum is intimately related to a generally accepted main mission of the school: teaching content to children by using appropriate instructional strategies and materials, and then assessing how well the students learned what was taught. There is a popular view of curriculum that is practical and efficient, and that is that there should exist tight and cohesive relationships between the written curriculum (e.g., study guides, planned courses), the taught curriculum, and the tested curriculum (English, 1988). It is a logical and effective model, and it has serve as the basis for good, productive curriculum studies, such as curriculum audits.

Additional emphasis for focused, productive, and assessable staff development programs will come about as a result of contract changes teachers are negotiating with their Boards. Many of these contracts now offer dollar incentives for teachers (and administrators) who earn additional graduate credits. Superintendents and Boards will encourage or even demand enrollment in productive, meaningful courses, such as those that are focused on or even designed to improve the teaching - learning situation. Courses taken haphazardously or by "collegial selection" will be discouraged.

"Collegially" oriented staff development initiatives, according to Fullan (1990), either fail to address the more basic question of school culture, or vastly underestimates what is involved in implementing change. There is also evidence that collaborative cultures, when they do occur, are achieved through the extraordinary work and dedication of one or a few individuals. These efforts usually are not continued after the departure of key individuals. Lortie (1975) identified "contrived" collegiality as another form of teacher isolation. "Contrived" collegiality can be seen in such initiatives as peer coaching, mentor teaching, joint planning, and formally scheduled meetings. It can ignore the real culture of the school and result in a proliferation of unwanted contacts among teachers, and these contacts consume scarce time and are not effective.

An important question for administrators and staff development personnel is: how can staff development be guided? We believe that the recommendations for a comprehensive curriculum study (e.g., audit) can serve as a sound basis for guiding the selection of staff development activities. Following this recommendation will assure that the money spent on staff development activities will be used to address and

correct curriculum weaknesses, and curriculum is a main function of the enterprise.

This approach is different from the paper and pencil questionnaire and/or opinionnaire method commonly used as a needs assessment techniques. A major disadvantage of the questionnaire/opinionnaire method is that there is no dialogue between the respondents and the data analyzers. The responses are tabulated and the results sent to staff development personnel on a printout sheet. Another disadvantage is that there is no assurance that the responses will be related to improving the teaching-learning situation.

The advantages of a curriculum study (e.g., audit) as the starting point for staff development are: the curriculum study is comprehensive, and it can also utilize questionnaire/opinionnaire instruments; and, it involves interviews and face-to-face contact as a way of getting complete and accurate information. The curriculum study is more expensive and more time consuming than other needs assessment techniques, but, because it is thorough and focused on curriculum, it is worth the expense.

An effective curriculum study should provide some minimum information is order to provide direction to staff development activities. As a beginning step, we should note that Peters and Waterman (1982) believe that excellent companies can select quickly the growth targets that seem most obvious to everyone. A curriculum needs assessment, then, should not overlook the obvious, and obvious problems can be quickly identified by using interviews and questionnaires with professional staff. As a minimum, the authors recommend that a curriculum study for needs assessment should answer these questions:

1. Do the dropout rates and/or failure rates warrant further investigation?
2. Is school attendance a problem?
3. Are any students "falling through the gaps"?
4. Are suspensions and expulsions a problem?
5. How well are students achieving?
6. Does the School Board have adequate policies related to curriculum and management?
7. Is the School Board concerned about student achievement?
8. What are the perceptions of interest groups?
9. What do previous curriculum and management studies reveal?
10. What has been the impact of previous staff development activities?
11. Are the budget and curriculum related?
12. How effective is the planning for all units and/or buildings?
13. What is the quality of existing long and short range plans?
14. How effective is the curriculum of each school?

There is no question that a staff development program should be developed around information from more that one source. School Board members and community members, who have a "feel" for community

expectations, should be consulted; parents, who best know the needs and desires of their children, should be consulted; business people, who know what skills children will need, should be consulted. Teachers and administrators, who have a vision of what an effective school should be and who know their own weaknesses, should be consulted. But, the most objective evidence about what "needs" to be done to improve education will be generated by a thorough and objective curriculum study.

As a final note, the authors recommend that districts contracting for a curriculum study avoid the flashy, quick, in-and-out approach offered by some individuals and companies. A thorough study should take one to three months.

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